THOUGHTS ON THE CHINESE QUESTION.

A Paper Read Before the Honolulu Social Science Association by M. M. Scott.

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Whether or not it is founded on a generalization wide and deep enough, a belief exists, especially among the European races that have come most closely in contact with the Chinese, that competition with the latter in certain important occupations is disastrous.

It is a question of comparatively recent origin. Until less than a half century ago, the Chinese, by their own exclusiveness, were shut out from competition with people of Europe and America. And it is, perhaps, fair to assume when England, with the other European governments and the United States, thundered at the gates of the "middle kingdom," for a treaty of "friendship, amity, and commerce," guaranteeing one another the right of free intercourse, trade and residence, that any one of these governments thought it would be called upon to forcibly, and by questionable means, put an end to that free competition which it voluntarily, yea almost with cannon for argument, sought, was out of the question. Yet such is now the case. It will be the effort of this paper, briefly, and certainly inadequately, to try to show, with the facts we have, whether this fear has a substantial basis; and if so, what are some of the causes that enable the Chinese to do cheaper work than the European.

The fear of competition, so far as I know, was first formulated in California and Australia. These are the two countries in which the Chinese, in large numbers, first came into contact with men of European origin.

In early mining days in California, the Chinese were burdened with a tax called the "foreign miners' tax," of four dollars a month. This tax was supposed to be levied upon all aliens—that is on those not citizens of the U. S. N.; but as a matter of fact no one paid it except Chinamen. Notwithstanding the burden, the Chinese mined successfully. They worked cheap placers, mines abandoned by men wanting higher wages, and "tailings"—dirt which had been once washed—and to them the results seemed like a fortune. From mining they branched out into other occupations, first gardening, then cigar-making, into the boot and shoe business, etc. It was not, perhaps, until between '60 and '70, about '65 or 6 that the hue and cry of "Chinese Cheap Labor" was raised.

The Democratic party, then in the minority and in bad odor, first made the Chinese question a political one. It was charged by their opponents, the Republicans, that the cry was pure demagoguery. I am inclined to the belief that if not entirely, it had largely the virus of demagoguism mixed with it at the beginning. The opposition to Chinese labor competition, thus early brought to itself, as its ally, the idle, the worthless, the thriftless and the incompetent.

The sentiment, however, gradually gained ground on the Pacific Coast among all classes and conditions of men that the competition of the Chinese was an evil. The Pacific Mail Co. had steamers of enormous size constructed for the express purpose of carrying them from China to San Francisco. From 1,000 to 1,500 coolies were carried every trip. The business was very profitable to the company. Sentiment on the coast quickly underwent a complete change. Politicians of both parties denounced the traffic as iniquitous in itself and ruinous to the permanent prosperity of the State. Merchants, tradesmen and manufacturers; politicians and men of no politics; clergymen and chambers of commerce all united in memorials to Congress to stop, or at least to restrict, an influx that had the appearance of prospective ruin.

At first, Congress took no notice of these memorials. The influential newspapers and magazines of the Eastern States denounced the Pacific Coast delegation in Congress as demagogues and their constituents as "hoodlums." Few members of Congress of either House east of the Rocky Mountains could be induced to give their sanction to any measure favoring even a modified restriction. Notably the New England representatives and senators were averse to such measures. They were invited to visit San Francisco, and to see for themselves the effect that Chinese competition had, and was likely to have on the future development of the great State of California, industrially and socially. Few of these men returned to their homes without, at least, modifying their views of the Chinaman and his methods. "They came to scoff," but went back convinced.

Thus after years of agitation, after treaties modifying and restricting it, we finally have the spectacle of a nation's taking matters into its own hand, the court of final resort, and declaring without consulting the party of the second part that "thus far shalt thou come and no farther." In Australia, in British Columbia, in the Hawaiian Kingdom, indeed, where the Chinaman has gone in large numbers, a like agitation and in some cases like measures have been pursued.

Along the Asiatic coasts, in those places colonized long ago by Europeans, and in which for a long time profitable employment in the various pursuits of skilled and unskilled labor was found, Chinese competition has done its work. In tailoring, including ladies' dress-making, shoemaking, carpentry, carriage manufacture, etc., etc., scarcely a European is to be found. Indeed much further. The Chinamen are now pushing to the wall that product of two civilizations, the European merchant, the nabob of the Orient.

It is thus seen, making all allowance for demagoguery, for the prejudices of the ignorant and the unthinking, that the concensus of opinion is against the unrestricted immigration of the Chinese. The cause is obvious. The Chinaman can under-live us. He can do cheaper work, simply because his standard of living is far below ours. He not only eats less—he thinks less—he feels less—he LIVES less. In any competition with the European race, of which he is capable, he will come out first. In the "struggle for existence" in a fair, field, he, as I believe, has no competitor.

It is not claimed that, in any department of effort, he is as capable as the European. I believe that the average European, from hoeing cane to any mechanical pursuit, can do more work and better work than the average Chinaman. But can the European do work enough to balance the difference in cost of living? In other words, does not the cost of living to the European bear a greater ratio to the product of his labor than that of the Chinaman? Unquestionably. In Honolulu, where everything is dear, a Chinaman can live, in his way, for perhaps six or seven dollars per month—at any rate for twenty-five cents a day. Now what would this sum amount to in the living expenses of an Englishman or an American? Well, perhaps in a kind of brutal, animal way, he could live on five or six times this sum. Suppose then that in amount of work and point of finish, three white men will equal five Chinamen. Again suppose the white men be paid twice the wages of the Chinamen. Say for argument, we pay the white men two dollars, and the Chinamen one dollar each per day. Now counting the lowest cost of living to each one in his accustomed way, the Celestial will live, thrive, rear a family and save money, while the white man's family, if he have one, will show signs of poverty and squalor. Thus we find that while the white man may do more and better work than the Chinaman, there is not enough difference, considering the two modes of life, to make the industrial contest an equal one. Our civilization is a costly one. Our food is costly, our clothing costly, our schools, churches, literature, etc., all cost money. Even our cleanliness and decency are costly, thus making the fruit and flower of life—our *morals*—costly.

"But," it may be said, "if the Chinese can beat us in the struggle for existence, is it not an evidence that he is the better man?" By no means? If we attach any *moral* significance to the word "better." Turn the thoroughbred horse and the donkey out together on equal terms, and see which will survive; and yet we do not for a moment call the donkey "better" than the horse. For most purposes for which we wish either, the horse is infinitely the superior. The "survival of the fittest," therefore, in a biological or scientific sense is a colorless scientific phrase, without any moral significance whatever; and it is in this sense used when speaking of the Chinese "surviving" in an industrial struggle with the European.

Then the question may arise, if the Chinaman is thus superior in this industrial sense abroad, when competing with the European, what may he become at home provided he adopts our methods in the arts and industries of life. May he not be able to deluge the world with the products of cheap labor, and thus ruinously undersell all competitors? If the conditions be closely scrutinized, I think this will prove an idle fear. We must remember that the environment of the Chinaman abroad is very different from that of his own home. Abroad he has the use of our tools and inventions for the abridgement of labor. At home he is at a hand to hand contest with nature, and is likely to remain thus.

I was never so impressed with the power of a *tool*, so clumsy even as a wheel-barrow, to facilitate the unaided exertions of man to do work, as when I saw both Chinese and Japanese removing material from railway cuts. A mat about two feet square, with a rope attached to each corner, was spread on the ground, with a man ahold of each rope. A fifth man slowly shoveled, or rather *hoed* the mat full, and the four men trotted slowly off and deposited something like a half-wheelbarrowful. One Irishman with a shovel and wheelbarrow would have done twice the work of the five Orientals it took to manage the mat. It will readily be seen that however industrious and economical he is, so long as he remains at home, Europeans need not fear him.

As to his adopting our civilization and becoming like us, I think there is no likelihood. I do not believe it possible for the donkey, admirable animal as he is in his way, to turn his nose to the back track, retrace his steps of development, get back to his original departure from the primal stock, and come forward again a horse, No, he has lost his opportunity. So with the Chinese. Their political, social, intellectual and moral development have been through entirely different channels from those of Europeans, and it seems to me that it is now too late for them to retrace their steps and begin anew. It is not claimed that they are incapable of change in certain important particulars, as regards the external man. Certainly, the Chinaman may become so that he will use a wheelbarrow. He may, in an imitative way, adopt some of our less important tools and machines. But there is no reason to suppose, in thus doing, he will be anything else than a Chinaman. The least thing that distinguishes one nation from another—indeed one man from another—are the externals. That which most profoundly separates races of men is the internal nervous, and therefore mental and moral organization. In these particulars treat the Chinaman as you will, surround him with conditions as you may—he will still be a Chinaman, including all that designation means.

Now, can we trace out some of the causes, note, perhaps, some of the conditions of his development, that enable him to live in such a way as to be able to distance all competitors in an industrial struggle? It is confessedly a very difficult task. Little is known of his history. In his early struggle from barbarism to his present state of civilization, almost nothing is known. If it were, plenty would be left unknown. No doubt, the impetus that any race of men attain long before historic times, largely modifies, even fixes its future character and career. Yet from tolerably trustworthy sources, we have something—chronicles though it be rather than history—which makes it certain he has a long national history.

Archdeacon Grey, for forty years among them, and a close student of their history and language, says: "There can be little donbt of the great antiquity of the Chinese Empire. It is not rash, I believe, to say that it has survived a period of 4,000 years, without having undergone any great change either in the laws by which it is governed, or in the speech, manners, and customs of its teeming population." It goes without saying that a political and social system 4,000 years old is a fixed one. All things, the man included, is fixed—crystalized.

Dr. Legg believes that the population of the country has not, perhaps, increased for the last 800 years. He thinks no improvements in that time have been made in the mechanical arts. The celestial has thus been at a standstill for centuries. He has lost in progress, but he has gained in that which makes him in perfect accord with his environment. With the teeming population, variously estimated, but not far either above or below 400,000,000, there has gone on the most strenuous struggle for the means of subsistence.

Even had the Chinaman twice the extent of empire that he has, he would still have a hard fight to live. At home, with his primitive implements of production, his labor produces little under the most favorable conditions, therefore, he is perforce compelled to live on little. As it is, with a redundant population, the maximum of labor with the minimum of food is the condition of his existence. Now, this severe struggle going on for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, make him profoundly different from the European. He can live upon an amount and kind of food, and apparently in fair condition as to health and strength, which would be utterly inadequate to the European.

No doubt the physiologist and the physician would smile to be told that the internal economy of the Chinaman is different from that of the white man. His organs may be anatomically the same but functionally they must be profoundly different, if not originally so, certainly made so by a long process of evolution. His shelter and sanitary conditions most of us are acquainted with abroad. They are much worse in China. The Chinamen have, for these almost untold centuries, crowded together in their living apartments, more like sardines than like human beings. They live among filth and impure air, at war with all our notions of hygienic laws.

His system can absorb, and either assimilate or throw off an amount of poison, that would produce an epidemic in a small American or European town. In times of diseases of an epidemic nature, wherever the Chinese are, they still bid defiance to sanitary laws, and have comparative immunity from the disease. As he is now, so he has been for ages. Perhaps the more sensitive to zymotic ailments have long since been killed out, and the rest and the diseases have agreed to "dwell together in peace." In this, as in other respects, he is fit to survive, while others will die.

Comparatively speaking, the Chinese are a homogeneous people. From Pekin to Canton, from the China Sea on the East, to the remotest Western frontier, one Chinaman is like another. Homogeneity is the rule, and heterogeneity is the racial exception. There is nothing like the mixture of closely allied species in the Chinese, as in the European race. He has for ages interbred, thus producing a permanent type, dwarfed and scrubby in some respects though it be, yet solid and hardy in character.

It is a well known biologic law, holding, good throughout organic nature, that a race thus developed is better fitted in the untrammeled struggle for existence, than a more highly diversified and developed one.

Finely bred horses, cattle, sheep or chickens require more and better food, and far more care than those of more permanent, but less esteemed type. In a limited way, because our data are meager, the same might be shown of human beings.

Now, so far as we know him, does the Chinaman answer to the kind of man we might expect from the conditions of his development? Admirably. He is industrious, abstemious, stolid, avaricious, unimaginative and unenthusiastic. Whoever heard of an enthusiastic Chinaman, except in money getting? As a race, they are unsympathetic. Archdeacon Gray says that they have no sympathy with the lame, the blind, the idiotic or those having any congenital disease, saying that they are justly punished for the sins of their ancestors. He even has few of those rather amiable weaknesses, that seem to be the sporadic outcroppings of a richer and more enthusiastic nature.

Is it at all likely, then, that the unrestricted contact with the Chinese will result in his being Europeanized? Will the 400,000,000 of China be elevated or is it probable that those with whom he comes into competition will be compelled to adopt his methods of living? This is the question to be faced, it seems to me, in any restrictive measures by European governments.

Wherever the Chinese go they carry their methods of living along with them. They have no assimilative tendency. Their clothes, food, manners, customs and habits are the same. They may demand the white man's wages, but his civilization they will have none of. They are content to live and to think as their forefathers lived and thought in the time of Confucius. The product of their labor may be very valuable to the white man in the way of piling up products, yet they will buy and consume little of these things when produced. Herein is one of the chief objections to his becoming a denizen at large among us.

Of course, it is not presumed here that under peculiar conditions, as in this country, or perhaps in some others, the Chinese are not desirable in limited numbers.

Such I think to be unquestionable. But I am trying to deal with the question in its largest aspect, in an unlimited way. Let us see if we can, what effect Chinese competition would have, say in the United States, if left to natural laws.

In his ability, if it be so, to do cheaper work, that is to make a larger product for smaller wages, he would, if left free to compete in sufficient numbers, displace those now employed. His employers, as long as a market could be found for their products at ruling rates, would drive a thriving bargain.

But when the great body of consumers of these products are driven out, or are compelled to live on a minimum, how will it affect the employers of labor, those who have things to sell? It is undeniable that a wage earner's ability to consume, depends on his wages as compared with the product of his labor. If his wage is a minimum, though he produce ever so much for his employer, his consumption will be a minimum. Thus, it seems to me, the Chinese-cheap-labor-business will act as a boomerang, returning to knock those out who expect most benefit.

It is idle to speak of justice and humanity having any hold upon employers of labor while political economy or economies remain what they are. Adam Smith laid it down as a law that when two employers run after one laborer, wages rise, and when two laborers run after one employer, wages fall.

Most writers on the subject adhere to the maxim at the present day. Every one is going to pay as little as possible for labor, and sell its product for the highest market price. I am now not considering with the subject any moral question whatever. My own opinion is that, as a universal principle, it is an economical mistake, and morally monstrous. Yet, at the present time, the rule seems to govern the economic world.

David A. Wells says that in most of those occupations in which the laborer makes use of modern implements, one unit of labor will produce from ten to fifteen times as much as it did one hundred years ago. Most assuredly, the laborer does not receive wages in a like ratio. In the midst of plenty, poverty and want wail through the most thickly inhabited parts of Europe and America already. Mr. Henry George attributes this state of affairs to the the private ownership of land. This may have some bearing upon the state of affairs; yet it would seem that a more reasonable solution is a high efficiency of labor with low wages—that is, the laborer's wages are low compared with his product—therefore his ability to consume is comparatively small. Hence when everything to make people comfortable is the most abundant, we usually hear of the hardest times and the most suffering.

If this is the state of affairs when laborers of our own kith and kin only are competing with one another, it would be doubly intensified, if the 400,000,000 Chinese were left free to compete with them. Seeing then that a minimum of wages means a minimum of consumption, an economic view of the question, to say nothing of a moral one, would suggest that Chinese COMPETITION, in a rightful way, be absolutely prohibited.

In setting forward these views of the competition of the Chinese with men of the European race, reference is of course had to a *real competition*. The fact must be recognized that there are countries whose climates are such that white men cannot, or will not work in them, especially if the labor be hard and of a low order of skill

In such countries, and in such occupations, Chinese labor seems to solve every problem.